

Chapter 10
The Crusades: Then and Now
By Thomas Madden
Archbishop's Lecture Series
Delivered December 1, 2011

Introduction of speaker by Jonathon Reyes:

We are particularly delighted to introduce a historian. Dr. Madden is a medieval historian and an expert on the crusades. Today we were hanging out – and some of you know I teach history and the crusades – and I told him this great thing I read about how many people would have died in order for blood to run in the streets during the crusades, and he said, “Yes, I remember that because I wrote it.”

It's my privilege this evening to introduce Thomas Madden, who is professor and director of Medieval and Renaissance Studies at St. Louis University, one of the top-rated programs of Medieval and Renaissance Studies in the United States. Dr. Madden's recent books include *The New and Concise History of the Crusades*, and *Empires of Trust*. He has written and lectured extensively on the history of the medieval Mediterranean and the history of Christianity and Islam...He is currently writing a new history of Venice. I'm privileged to say we have before us one of the pre-eminent world historians on medieval history, and please join me in welcoming Dr. Thomas Madden.

I'm very happy to be here today to discuss something of a rarity in my field of medieval history, a topic of timely interest. I think that's precisely what the crusades have become, particularly in the last 10 years, since the attacks of September 11, 2001. Since then the crusades have been pulled from the pages of history texts and spread across the front pages and televisions screens of America. Ten years ago in 1999, I wrote one of those textbooks. It was a short introduction on a topic that was taught in only a few classrooms around the country, the Crusades. Two years later, as Americans struggled to understand why they had been attacked, it left the classroom and began appearing on bookstore shelves nationwide. And it still remains there. Because I was the only living American scholar who had written a book on the crusades, on September 12 I found my email inbox full and my phone ringing off the hook with requests for interviews. I was petrified when I did my first one – it was an NPR segment – but soon after it became routine, (although not with NPR, since they don't like what I say anymore.) In the hundreds of interviews I have given since then, questions have always ended up at the same place: Are the crusades the root cause of the struggle between Islam and the West? In other words, aren't the crusades really to blame?

Osama Bin Laden certainly thought so. He and his supporters never failed to describe the American war against terrorism as a new crusade against Islam and Americans themselves as crusaders. This is not an uncommon view in the Mideast today. Moammar Khadafy repeatedly, and as recently as August 25, referred to NATO forces as crusaders, calling on faithful Muslims to rise up against them. Ironically, this perspective on the medieval crusades is actually not far from that of most people in the west. And that's no coincidence, for as I will argue, it is Western culture that provided Osama Bin Laden and Moammar Khadafy with what was their recovered memory of the crusades.

In popular Western culture today, the crusades are generally remembered as a series of Holy Wars against Islam led by power-hungry Popes and fought by religious fanatics. They were the epitome of self-righteousness and intolerance, a black stain on the history of the Catholic Church in particular and Western civilization in general. A breed of proto-imperialists, the crusaders introduced western aggression to the peaceful Middle East and then deformed the enlightened Muslim culture, leaving it in

1 ruins. For variations on this theme, one need not look far. You could see for example any of these that
2 you see up here: The BBC/A&E documentary *The Crusades*, which was hosted by none other than Terry
3 Jones of Monty Python fame, or the history channel's documentary, *The Crusades – Crescent and the*
4 *Cross*, or the Ridley Scott movie, *The Kingdom of Heaven*, which if you get it, make sure you get the
5 bonus material because I'm on the bonus materials saying that the rest of it is wrong.

6 Indeed I can think of no popular media portrayal of the crusades that does not hold in some
7 measure to this view. Yet that is not at all the way the Europeans viewed the crusades when they were
8 happening. Indeed, so far from being an offensive attack on the lands of Islam, Western Christians saw
9 the crusades as defensive reactions to Muslim aggression. And they had a point. Christians in the 11th
10 century were not paranoid fanatics. Muslims really were gunning for them. From the time of Mohammad,
11 the Muslim state had expanded, primarily by the sword. Traditional Muslim thought divided the world
12 into two spheres, the abode of Islam, the Dar al-Islam, and the abode of war, the Dar al-harab.
13 Christianity, and for that matter any other non-Muslim religion, has no abode. Christians and Jews can be
14 tolerated within a Muslim state, under Muslim rule, living under Muslim law, but their states must be
15 destroyed, and they must be conquered. When Mohammad was waging war against Mecca in the 7th
16 century, Christianity was the dominant religion of power and wealth, which you can see from this map
17 here. As the faith of the Roman Empire, it expanded through the entire Mediterranean, including the
18 Middle East, where it was born. The Christian world, therefore, was a prime target for the earliest caliphs,
19 and it would remain so for Muslim leaders for the next thousand years.

20 With enormous energy, the warriors of Islam struck out against the Christians shortly after
21 Mohammad's death in 632. They were extremely successful. Palestine, Syria, Egypt, these were the most
22 heavily Christian areas in the world – quickly succumbed. By the 8th century, Muslim armies had
23 conquered all of Christian North Africa, and Spain. In the 11th century, the Seljuk Turks conquered Asia
24 Minor, what is today Turkey, which had been Christian since the days of St. Paul. The old Christian
25 Roman Empire, known to modern historians as the Byzantine Empire, was reduced to little more than just
26 Greece. In desperation, the emperor of Constantinople sent word to the Christians in Western Europe
27 asking them to aid their brothers and sisters in the east. That is what gave birth to the Crusades. They
28 were a response to more than 4 centuries of conquest, in which Muslim armies had already captured two-
29 thirds of the old Christian world. At some point, Christianity, as a faith and as a culture, either defended
30 itself or was subsumed by Islam. The crusades were that defense.

31 Pope Urban II called on the knights of Christendom to push back the conquests of Islam at the
32 Council of Clarendon in 1095. The response was tremendous. Many thousands of warriors took the vow
33 of the cross and prepared for war. Why did they do it? The answer to that question has been badly
34 misunderstood. It was once believed that crusaders were lack-lands and ne'er-do-wells, who took
35 advantage of the situation to rob and pillage in a far away land. Many high school and college textbooks
36 continue to present the crusades in just this way. However, during the last two decades, computer-assisted
37 charter studies proved this to be wrong. Scholars have discovered that crusading knights generally were
38 wealthy men, with plenty of their own land in Europe. Nevertheless, they spent enormous sums to
39 undertake these missions. Crusading was not cheap. Even wealthy lords could easily impoverish
40 themselves and their families by joining a crusade, and they often did. They did so not because they
41 expected material wealth, which they already had in abundance, but because they hoped to store up
42 treasure "where rust and moth could not corrupt." These were professional warriors, who were keenly
43 aware of the sinfulness of their profession and willing to undertake the hardships of the crusade as a
44 penitential act of charity and love. Europe is littered with literally thousands of medieval charters attesting
45 to just these sentiments, in which these men and women still speak to us today. Now, of course, they were
46 not opposed to capturing booty if it could be had, but the truth is the crusades were notoriously bad for
47 plunder. A few people got rich, but the vast majority returned with nothing. Indeed, many did not return at
48 all. Approximately one out of every two crusaders died on the journey.

1 Pope Urban II gave the crusaders two goals, both of which would remain central to the eastern
2 crusades for centuries. The first was to redeem the Christians of the East, those who had been conquered
3 by the Turks. As a successor, Pope Innocent II later wrote, "How does a man love, according to divine
4 precepts, his neighbor as himself, when, knowing that his Christian brothers in faith and in name are held
5 by the perfidious Muslims, in strict confinement, and weighed down by the yoke of heaviest servitude, he
6 does not devote himself to the task of freeing them? Is it by chance that you do not know that many
7 thousands of Christians are bound in slavery and imprisoned by the Muslims, tortured with innumerable
8 torments?"

9 Crusading, as Jonathon Riley Smith, the distinguished historian from Cambridge, rightly argued,
10 was seen by medieval people as an act of love – in this case, the love of neighbor. The crusade was seen
11 as an errand of mercy to right a terrible wrong. As the pope later wrote to the Knights Templar, "You
12 carry out in deeds the words of the gospel: Greater love than this has no man, than he would lay down his
13 life for his friends."

14 The second goal of the crusades was the liberation of Jerusalem and the other places made holy
15 by the life of Christ. The word crusade is modern. Medieval crusaders called themselves, and saw
16 themselves, as pilgrims, pilgrims to the Holy Sepulcher. The crusade indulgence they received was
17 canonically related to the penitential pilgrimage indulgence. In medieval society, it is not surprising that
18 this goal was often frequently described in feudal terms. For example when calling the 5th crusade in
19 1215, pope innocent III wrote, "Consider, most dear sons, consider carefully, that if any temporal king
20 was thrown out of his domain, and perhaps captured, would he not, when he was restored to his liberty
21 and the time had come for dispensing justice would look on his vassals as unfaithful and traitors unless
22 they had committed not only their property, but also their persons to the task of freeing him? And
23 similarly, will not Jesus Christ, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, whose servant you cannot deny
24 being, who joined your soul to your body, who redeemed you with his precious blood, condemn you for
25 the vice of ingratitude and the crime of infidelity if you neglect to help him?"

26 The re-conquest of Jerusalem therefore, was understood by medieval people as an act of
27 restoration and as an open declaration of one's love of God. Now medieval people knew that God had the
28 power to restore Jerusalem himself, indeed restore the whole world to his rule, yet, as St. Bernard of
29 Clairvaux preached, he did not do so as a blessing to his people. Bernard wrote, "Again, I say, consider
30 the Almighty's goodness and pay heed to his plans of mercy. He puts himself under obligation to you, or
31 rather feigns to do so, that he can help you to satisfy your obligations towards himself."

32 In medieval Europe, crusades to the east were universally seen as acts of tremendous good by
33 everyone. In fact, there were a couple of scholars who tried to write books on medieval criticism of the
34 crusades, and they turned out to be very, very small books. And how could this not be true. A crusader
35 was one who, at great expense, and personal peril, sought to rescue the downtrodden, defend the
36 defenseless, and restore to Christendom what had been violently taken away. A crusade indulgence, then,
37 was a formal recognition of the penitential component of these actions. Crusaders were sinners. They
38 undertook a crusade not only to defend their world, but to atone for their sins. It was a spiritual activity.
39 By the nature of their profession, warriors put their souls at risk. The Crusade was a means to save their
40 souls. And that was no small thing. In the medieval world, where death was always near at hand, the
41 salvation of one's soul meant everything. It was a matter of constant concern.

42 By any reckoning, the first crusade was a long shot. There was no leader, no chain of command,
43 no supply lines, no detailed strategy – no strategy at all, really – it was simply thousands of warriors
44 marching deep into enemy territory, committed to a common cause. Many of them died, either in battle or
45 thru disease or starvation. It was a rough campaign, one that seemed always on the brink of disaster. Yet,
46 it was astonishingly successful. By 1098, the crusaders had restored the city of Nicaea, and then the great

city of Antioch to Christian rule. In July, 1099 they had conquered Jerusalem and began to build a Christian state in Palestine.

The joy in Europe was unbridled. It seemed that the tide of history, which had lifted the Muslims to such height, was at last turning. But, it was not. When we think about the Middle Ages, it is easy to view Europe in light of what it became, rather than what it was. The colossus of the medieval world was Islam, and not Christendom. The crusades are interesting because they were an attempt to counter that trend. But in five centuries of crusading, it was only the first crusade that significantly rolled back the military progress of Islam in the east. It was all downhill from there. Once the Muslim states unified against the new Christian kingdom of Jerusalem, it was doomed.

If the crusades represented the highest good, how could they fail? If crusaders fought for God, why did the victories go to his enemies? These were the questions that vexed Christians in the middle ages. The answer lay no further than the Bible. The ancient Israelites, God's chosen people, had frequently been defeated by godless people. It was not because God had abandoned them, or because he favored the foreigners; instead, he used these defeats as a means of chastising his people for their sins. Europeans took their defeats at the hands of Muslims, as clear evidence of their own sinfulness. This led to renewed attempts to purify the church and Christian society that stretched thru the rest of the middle ages. Success in the crusades became the barometer of the soul of Christendom. When they succeeded, God was once again pleased with his people. The problem was they did not succeed. The last Christian outpost in the Holy Land fell in 1291. In subsequent centuries, the dramatic growth of Muslim power, particularly of the Ottoman Empire, as shown in this map, spelled only further defeats for the west. By the 14th century, the crusades were no longer wars to turn away Muslim conquests in faraway lands, but instead had become desperate and largely unsuccessful attempts to defend Europe itself against Muslim invasion. By the 16th century, the Ottoman Turks had conquered all of the Middle East, North Africa, and southeastern Europe, including areas that are today Greece, Bulgaria, Albania, Hungary, and others. Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent came within a hair's breadth of conquering Vienna, which would have left all of Germany at his mercy. Vienna was saved by freak rainstorms, not the crusades. It was in the 16th century when Western Europe was in the gravest danger of Muslim conquest. In fact, most Europeans believed that the conquest was probably inevitable. That's when the crusades as an institution began to collapse utterly.

There are many reasons for this. As the secular authority in Europe increased, religious unity crumbled. Europeans began dividing themselves along political lines. In addition, there was a strong desire in the west for church reform. Reformers invariably criticized doctrines central to crusading, in particular the secular authority of the pope and the doctrine of indulgence. With the spread of the Protestant Reformation, crusading was viewed along confessional lines. Protestants, like Martin Luther, condemned crusading as a tool of a corrupt papacy. Yet even Protestants had to reckon with the awesome power of the Turks, and the danger it posed to Christian Europe. If the crusades were morally bankrupt, as the Protestants insisted, how then could Europeans unite to defend against the common enemy?

For a thousand years after the death of the prophet, Muslim armies had managed to conquer fully three-quarters of the old Christian world, despite the efforts of generations of crusaders to halt or turn back this advance. An impartial observer at the time might well have concluded that Christendom was a doomed remnant of the old Roman Empire, destined to be supplanted by the more energetic and youthful culture of Islam. Yet that observer would have been wrong. Within Europe, new ideas were brewing that would have dramatic and unprecedented repercussions, not just in the Mediterranean, but across the entire world. Born out of a unique blend of faith, reason, individualism, and entrepreneurialism, those ideas produced a rapid increase in scientific experimentation, with immediately practical applications. By the 17th century, European wealth and power was growing exponentially. Europeans were entering a new and utterly unprecedented age. It is one of the most remarkable events in history, I think, that the Christian

1 West, an eternally divided region seemingly on the brink of conquest by a powerful empire, suddenly
2 burst forth with amazing new energy, neutralizing its enemies and expanding across the globe, something
3 that no culture or civilization has ever done before. The specter of advancing Muslim armies, which for
4 centuries had posed such a danger to the Christian West, no longer constituted a serious threat. Indeed, as
5 the gaze of Europeans now spanned new global horizons, they soon forgot that such a threat had existed
6 at all. The Muslim world was no longer viewed as a dread enemy, but simply as one more backward,
7 global culture. From that perspective, the medieval crusades began to seem to Europeans as distant and
8 unnecessary, a discarded artifact from the childhood of the civilization.

9 The 18th century saw the rise of the Enlightenment, with its strict emphasis on rational thought,
10 religious toleration, and anticlericalism. Now, in an intellectual atmosphere like that, the medieval
11 crusades were not going to fare very well. Enlightenment historians like Voltaire and Edward Gibbon,
12 viewed the Middle Ages in general as a pool of ignorance, superstition, and fanaticism that stood between
13 them and the glories of antiquity. Not surprisingly, the crusades were described by them as a bizarre
14 manifestation of medieval barbarism, in which thousands of the deceived and the foolish marched thru
15 rivers of blood in a pitiful attempt to save their souls. In his famous *The Decline and Fall of the Roman*
16 *Empire*, written in 1776, Gibbon insisted that nothing good at all came out of the crusades except perhaps
17 Europe's exposure to more sophisticated eastern cultures.

18 During the 19th century, the crusades were rehabilitated by the Romantic Movement, which
19 adored everything medieval, and by the new ideologies of nationalism and imperialism. French
20 nationalists for example, saw their country as both the cultural epicenter and the natural leader of Europe.
21 The French proudly look back on the medieval crusades, in the 19th century, born and nurtured in
22 medieval France as a clear example of their country's greatness. When the French invaded and conquered
23 Algeria in 1830, the campaign was widely described as a successor to St. Louis IX's crusade to Tunisia in
24 1270. However, the crusades were refashioned to become something that they never were – France's first
25 attempt to bring the fruits of civilization to the backward Muslim world. As such, the crusades were
26 retooled to become the first chapter in European colonialism.

27 This worked well, since all European colonial powers in the 19th century could boast famous
28 crusaders from the Middle Ages in their histories. That's why you find so many statues of these still today
29 in Europe. Germany had Frederick Barbarossa, England had Richard the Lion Heart – his statue is right
30 outside of Parliament. And even tiny Belgium had Godfrey de Boullion. The aftermath of WWI brought
31 about the fall of the once mighty Ottoman Empire, the last great Muslim state. In dividing up the remains
32 of the Ottoman Empire, the League of Nations gave control of Palestine and Syria to Britain and France.
33 Britain got Palestine, France got Syria. Steeped in these imagined medieval precedents, Europeans could
34 scarcely have avoided seeing this new colonialism as the final chapter in the long history of the crusades.
35 The popular London magazine, *Punch*, ran a drawing of Richard the Lion Heart watching the British
36 entry into Jerusalem with the caption, "At last, my dream come true." After taking command in Syria, the
37 French general Henri Gouraud remarked, as he entered into the city of Damascus, "Behold, Saladin, we
38 have returned."

39 It is commonly said that memories in the Middle East are long, and although the crusades have
40 been forgotten in the west, they are still vividly remembered where they happened. For example, in a
41 speech delivered at Georgetown University a few weeks after the attacks, former president Bill Clinton
42 stated, "Those of us who come from various European lineages are not blameless. Indeed, in the first
43 crusade, when the Christian soldiers took Jerusalem, they first burned a synagogue with 300 Jews in it,
44 and proceeded to kill every woman and child who was Muslim on the Temple Mount. The
45 contemporaneous descriptions of the events describe soldiers walking on the Temple Mount, a holy place
46 to Christians and Muslims, with blood running up to their knees. I can tell you that story is still being told
47 today in the Middle East, and we are still paying for it."

1 The president is correct that the story is still told, but it is neither accurate, nor is it a long-held
2 memory of a traumatic event. Indeed, the simple and startling fact is that the crusades were virtually
3 unknown in the Muslim world even a century ago. The term for the crusade in Arabic – *hurub al-salib* –
4 was only introduced into the Arab language in the mid-19th century. The first Arabic history of the
5 crusades was not written until 1899. In other words, a hundred years ago no one at all was telling the
6 President's story, because no one at all remembered the crusades. How could Muslims not remember
7 centuries of Christian holy wars waged against them? It must be remembered that although the crusades
8 were of monumental importance to Europeans, they were a very minor, largely insignificant thing to the
9 Muslim world. Traditionally, Muslims took very little notice of people or events outside the abode of
10 Islam – the Dar al-Islam. There was nothing to differentiate the crusades from any other, numerous, and
11 nearly constant wars fought against infidels. The crusades were, in any case, unsuccessful, and therefore,
12 from their perspective, irrelevant. A western traveler in the 18th century would have been hard-pressed to
13 have found a Muslim in the Middle East who had ever heard of the crusades. Even in the 19th century,
14 they were known only to a handful of Muslim intellectuals. In the grand sweep of Islamic history, the
15 crusades simply did not matter.

16 Muslim perceptions of their own history changed in the 20th century. Rescued from obscurity, the
17 crusades were given a place in history and an importance that they had never enjoyed before. The long
18 memory of the crusades in the Muslim world is in fact a *constructed* memory, one in which the memory
19 is much younger than the event itself.

20 How did this come about? Well, as we have seen, when European colonial powers took control of
21 the Middle East, in the wake of the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, they brought with them a concept of
22 the crusades – a faulty concept of the crusades – and an understanding of their own actions within that
23 medieval context. They saw themselves as crusaders, returning. In books and in colonial schools,
24 Europeans taught the Muslim world about the crusades. They were vividly described as heroic
25 enterprises, whose aim, like those of the modern Europeans, was to bring civilization to the Middle East.
26 It was at this time that Saladin was re-introduced to the Muslim world. Hard as it is to believe, the famous
27 sultan had been virtually forgotten in the Middle East. On further reflection, though, that should not be
28 too surprising. Saladin was not an Arab, but a Kurd, an ethnic group not well-liked by Arabs or Turks
29 even today. Although he had won the battle of Hattin against the Christians in 1187, and subsequently
30 conquered Jerusalem and much of the crusader kingdom, Saladin's successes, as well as his dynasty, were
31 short lived. The third crusade managed to erase most of his conquests – even Jerusalem would not remain
32 permanently in Muslim hands. Saladin may have been forgotten in the Middle East, but he was very well
33 remembered in Europe. In part this was because his manners and his actions seemed to have much in
34 common with the chivalric knight. There is no doubt that Richard the Lion Heart thought very highly of
35 Saladin. This made him a perfect foil for the celebrated crusader-king, and he therefore figured
36 prominently in the medieval romances throughout the 14th, 15th, and 16th centuries. In time, Western
37 storytellers would have Saladin being knighted, and even converting to Christianity. In medieval Venice,
38 the name Saladin had a brief popularity for Christian boys. It was this idealized Saladin – the noble
39 warrior, merciful ruler, and great unifier – that modern Europeans brought back with them when they
40 returned to the Middle East in the 19th and 20th centuries. This occurred most dramatically in 1899, when
41 Kaiser Wilhelm II of Germany the neglected and largely forgotten tomb of Saladin in Damascus. In fact,
42 Wilhelm came to Damascus and asked to see the tomb of Saladin and no one knew where it was, so he
43 had to explain who Saladin was, and they eventually found it – it was all overgrown. Shocked at the poor
44 state of the monument, Kaiser Wilhelm paid for the creation of an entirely new mausoleum for Saladin,
45 which is the one that's there today, on which he placed a bronze wreath with the inscription, "From one
46 great Emperor to another."

47 Two main groups, nationalists and Islamists, stood in opposition to European colonialism in the
48 Middle East in the 20th century. Nationalists, Arab nationalists, demanded sovereign states independent of

1 European rule. Islamists looked to the Quran and Islamic history. Nationalists and Islamists were
2 naturally antagonistic to each other, and they still are today. Yet they both shared a common desire to
3 eject European powers from the Middle East. Since the colonialists had themselves equated their
4 occupation with the medieval crusades, it was natural enough for the Muslims, and especially the Arabs,
5 to do the same. This became particularly pronounced after the creation of the state of Israel, which Arabs
6 contended was a new crusader kingdom. Now, the fact that Israel was Jewish was irrelevant. It was still a
7 non-Muslim state planted in the former lands of the crusaders. By the 1950s, however, colonialism was
8 largely discredited in the west, and in the United States and in Britain, intellectuals began to calculate the
9 harm done to the world by the legacy of imperialism. The crusades, which had already been redefined as
10 the west's first colonial venture, were tarred now with the same brush. They were, it was argued, nothing
11 more than destructive wars of greed, cynically covered in a thin veneer of pious platitudes. Indeed, so
12 great was this feeling, primarily among western elites and intellectuals, that a large number of them took
13 part in a walk in the footsteps of the first crusade on its 900th anniversary in 1999. The purpose of this – it
14 was called the Reconciliation Walk – was to apologize to everyone in the Middle East for the crusades
15 and their continued legacy. They literally – it was mostly Americans and Europeans – walked the entire
16 route of the first crusade, and along the way they would deliver signed letters of apology to whomever
17 they found. The apology, which was delivered by the thousands, read: "Nine hundred years ago our
18 forefathers carried the name of Jesus Christ in battle across the middle east. Fueled by fear, greed, and
19 hatred, they betrayed the name of Christ. We deeply regret the atrocities committed in the name of Christ.
20 Where they were motivated by hatred and prejudice, we offer love and brotherhood."

21 Arab nationalists and Islamists agreed fully with this interpretation of the crusades. Poverty,
22 violence, and corruption in the Middle East were said to be the lingering effects of the crusades and
23 subsequent European imperialism. The Muslim world had failed to keep up with the west because it had
24 been dealt a debilitating blow by the crusaders, a blow that was repeated by the European descendants in
25 the 19th century. The dictators that ruled the now independent Arab states seized on this as a means of
26 deflecting criticism from their own regimes. Generations of Arab school children have been taught that
27 the crusades were a clear case of good versus evil. Rapacious and zealous crusaders swept into a peaceful
28 and sophisticated Muslim world leaving carnage and destruction in their wake. Yet Saladin, the great and
29 heroic Muslim leader, led the Muslims to victory, capturing Jerusalem and defeating the invaders. Not
30 surprisingly, Arab leaders today continue to invoke this recovered memory of the crusades and of Saladin.
31 For example, in 1992, the Syrian leader Hafaz Assad placed a life-size equestrian statue of the sultan,
32 complete with defeated crusader lords groveling below, directly in front of the Damascus citadel, not a
33 hundred yards away from a massive portrait of Assad himself. A depiction of the statue is even on the
34 Syrian currency. The former president of Iraq, Saddam Hussein, regularly referred to himself as the new
35 Saladin who would unite the Arab world against their common foes, which is rather odd, since Saladin
36 was not an Arab, but a Kurd. However, Saladin was from Tikrit, which was the hometown of Saddam
37 Hussein, so he had that going for him.

38 Today, many Islamists believe that the West, and in particular the United States, is prosecuting a
39 new crusade, one that is being fought on many fronts. American military bases, especially those in
40 Muslim countries, are described as the return of crusader forces. When Osama Bin Laden issued his
41 declaration of jihad, on February 23, 1998, he did so against "the Jews and the crusaders." He wrote, "The
42 Arabian Peninsula has never, since Allah made it flat, created its deserts and circled it with seas, been
43 stormed by any forces like the crusader armies spreading in it like locusts." The crusaders are us. The
44 attacks on the United States on September 11th were viewed by Islamists as acts of jihad against a
45 crusading state. They were a new battle of Hattin, a new field of blood. When the United States declared
46 war on Afghanistan and Islamist terrorism, European countries rose up in support. This, too, Islamists
47 viewed through the prism of the crusades. In an October, 2001 Al-Jazeera interview, Bin Laden remarked,
48 "This is a recurring war. The original crusades were brought by Richard from Britain, Louis from France,

1 and Barbarossa from Germany. Today, the crusading countries rushed as soon as Bush raised the cross.
2 They accepted the rule of the cross.”

3 In Amin Maalouf’s popular book, *The Crusades Through Arab Eyes*, he asked the question, “Can
4 we go so far as to claim that the crusades marked the beginning of the rise of western Europe, which
5 would gradually come to dominate the world and sounded the death knell of Arab civilization?” With
6 some qualifications, Maalouf answers in the affirmative. He writes, “Although the epic of the crusades
7 ignited a genuine cultural and economic revolution in western Europe, in the Orient these holy wars led to
8 long centuries of decadence. Assaulted from all quarters, the Muslim world turned in on itself. “He goes
9 on, “There can be no doubt that the schism between these two worlds dates from the crusades, deeply felt
10 by the Arab today as an act of rape.”

11 Now Maalouf, who is a novelist, offers a conclusion that is perfectly in keeping with the modern
12 consensus in both the Middle East and the West. Popular it may be, it is nonetheless wrong. Scholars have
13 long argued that the crusades had no beneficial effect on Europe’s economy. Indeed, the crusades
14 constituted a massive drain on European resources. The rise of population and wealth in Europe pre-dated
15 the crusades – indeed, they allowed them to happen at all. And rather than decadent and assaulted on all
16 sides, the Muslim world was growing to ever-new heights of power and prosperity, long after the
17 destruction of the crusader states in 1291. It was the Muslim world, under the rule of the Ottoman sultans,
18 that would invade Western Europe, seriously threatening the last remnant of Christendom in the world.
19 The crusades contributed nothing at all to the decline of the Muslim world. Indeed, the crusades are
20 evidence of the decline of the Christian West, which was forced to mount these desperate expeditions to
21 defend against ever-expanding Muslim empires.

22 Returning to the question with which I began – are the crusades to blame for the current tensions
23 between Islam and the west – the simple answer is no. The crusades were a medieval phenomenon, a part
24 of a medieval world very different from our world today. Christians saw the crusades to the east as
25 religious wars waged in defense of their world – of Christendom. For their part, medieval Muslims had no
26 understanding of or interest in the crusades. The crusader kingdom of Jerusalem was simply one more
27 state in an already chaotic political landscape. When the Muslims of the region finally united, they
28 dispatched the infidels, and that was all. The crusades were a tiny crumb in the big soup of Islamic
29 history.

30 It is not the crusades that led to the attacks of September 11th, but an artificial memory of the
31 crusades, constructed by modern colonial powers and passed down by Arab nationalists and Islamists.
32 This new memory strips the expeditions of every aspect of their age, dressing the up instead in the tattered
33 rags of 19th century imperialism. The crusades have thus become an icon for modern agendas that
34 medieval Christians, and Muslims, could scarcely have understood, let alone condoned.

35 Thank you.

36

37

38